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Special report: Protecting our Environment

Toxics in fertilizers

A Concern for Washington Consumers

How many of you home gardeners bring a laptop computer with you to the local store where you buy fertilizers? I'm willing to bet that none of you do. However, a new state law assumes that shoppers will easily hop on the Internet to look up information about toxics in fertilizers they are about to purchase.

This law, which was opposed by a majority of Democrats in the House of Representatives, significantly weakened an earlier effort to let consumers know that toxic materials such as mercury, lead, cobalt and arsenic might be in the fertilizer they are using to grow their home vegetables.

I, for one, think the consumers of Washington have a right to know exactly what is going into the fertilizer they are using on their home-grown tomatoes. Unfortunately, the new law makes this information much more difficult for consumers to get. Wary consumers will now have to read the label for a statement that directs them to a web site on the Internet if they want specific information about the levels of toxics in the product. Obviously, most consumers will not choose to put that bag of fertilizer down, then run home or to the library and check the information by computer.

The new law reversed legislation that passed only a year earlier which required packaged fertilizers to have a label stating that the product had been registered with the Washington State Department of Agriculture and, when applied as directed, meets this state's standards for arsenic, cadmium, cobalt, mercury, molybdenum, lead, nickel, selenium, and zinc.

The scientific community is divided on what constitutes dangerous levels of toxic waste in fertilizers. While the debate rages, we at least owe consumers a heads up that the product they are using to grow food may contain toxins. I will urge my fellow legislators to revisit this issue at the earliest opportunity.

Cougar battle looms again

It has only been three years since two-thirds of Washington's voters banned the use of dogs to hunt cougar and black-bear populations (Initiative 655). In our 36th district, 79% voted for the ban. But many hunters and legislators now hope to use a recent increase in cougar incidents to overturn the public's decision. I will strongly oppose this effort, as I did earlier this year.

Population sprawl into cougar habitats raises legitimate concerns for public safety. But repealing the public's clear will is not the answer. Initiative 655 already allows the use of dogs to hunt individual cougars that threaten public safety, and cougars involved in recent highly-publicized incidents were in fact tracked by dogs and killed shortly after the incidents occurred. The public ban is against using dogs to hunt cougar *populations*, and this ban is as justified today as it was three years ago.

What is really needed is an education campaign on how to avoid attracting cougars and how to react when a cougar is sighted or suspected. I hope to steer the Legislature in this direction when we meet in January.

Special report: Protecting our Environment

Saving Loomis Forest

Our fight to save the Loomis Forest from chainsaws is over! A \$3.4 million donation by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen guarantees that a vital part of this ancient forest will be saved from logging and development.

Environmentalists had previously won the right to buy timber and development rights to 25,000 acres in the forest – if they could raise \$13.1 million. I strongly supported this agreement, and was relieved when more than 5,000 private donations raised the necessary \$13.1 million just in time to beat a July deadline. But in early October, a reappraisal increased the purchase price by \$3.4 million, and environmentalists were given only a few months to raise the additional money.

Allen’s donation saved the deal. This is very good news to anyone who cares about preserving Washington’s remaining wilderness. The Loomis is not only important habitat for grizzly bears, marten, moose and the healthiest lynx population in the continental United States, it is also the largest remaining roadless area in state-owned trust land. It will now become a protected conservation area for wildlife and future generations of Washingtonians.



Salmon: Extinction is not an option

This year’s listing of Puget Sound wild Chinook in the federal Endangered Species Act made us the first major city in the country to be directly affected by the act. While large challenges remain ahead, the response by our state and local governments has to this point been impressive.

In our 1999 session, the Legislature showed it embraced Governor Locke’s ‘Extinction is not an option’ agenda by budgeting \$223 million in state and federal funds for salmon recovery — a sizable amount given our tight budget picture.

King County and the City of Seattle are also working together to ensure that salmon remain an important part of our heritage. A good example is the October joint agreement to eliminate, by next July, the use of hazardous pesticides on land managed by the city or county. For those with Internet access, I highly recommend King County’s salmon recovery web page: <http://www.metrokc.gov/exec/esa/index.htm>.

Special thanks to Seattle City Light

Seattle City Light deserves special recognition for its “fish first” commitment to saving salmon. When endangered Puget Sound Chinook recently returned to the Skagit River in smaller numbers than expected, Seattle City Light voluntarily exceeded all requirements to adjust water flows to help more eggs survive. This level of commitment is why Seattle City Light was honored with a Nature Conservancy Public Service Award last year.



*Will there
always be
salmon at
the Ballard
Locks?*

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Printed on recycled paper

**Special report:
Protecting our Environment**

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